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ABSTRACT

The applications of biographical concepts in educational settings were examined through a case study of one researcher's use of the biographical narrative interview to examine the connection between subjective and structural conditions and coping strategies in individual lives and to inform adult education practitioners. The biographical approach illustrated in the case study is based on the writings of F. Schutze, who has used examples of biographical "trajectories" or "changing processes" to show how structures dominate biographies for long periods and how social science and educational researchers can use narrative interviews to reconstruct individual actions in the framework of social situations. According to Schutze, a recapitulation of experiences contains the following cognitive figures: (1) the biography holder or event holder; (2) the frame of events and experiences; (3) situations, life milieus, and social structures as the setting of orientation and condition; and (4) the real shape of life history. These cognitive figures constitute a kind of dynamic landscape in which the basic process-structures of life courses can be rebuilt in the following attitudes: (1) the biographical action scheme, which shows individuals as the creators of their own biography; (2) institutional patterns for the life-course procedure; (3) life "trajectories"; and (4) transformation processes. (Contains 10 references) (MN)

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Rudolf Egger

The myth of the key from an outdoor perspective
Applications of biographical concepts in educational settings: A case study

„A key, a kingdom for a key"
(Not Shakespeare,
maybe Woody Allen,
certainly an adult learner)

Let me start this article with a short fairy-tale.
Once upon a time, there was a princess, caught by a draggon or an evil godmother. The girl was locked up in a tower and all the young princes in the whole country tried to bring her out and to become the husband of the lady. But they could't suceed, because they didn't have the right key. The years went by and once the right man came at the right time and he didn't even have to touch his sword to get into the tower. The door was unlocked, because he came quiet at the right moment.
Well, that's a simple story, but in a way it tells a lot about nowadays discussions about so called *key qualifications* in our society. In my oppinion there lies the same structure of power and poverty behind this approach and the little story - *the myth of the key*, that means: You just have to try and you'll get in the tower, the castle or the labour-market. Everybody can suceed if he's working hardly enough. But in the tale you saw, that there are other mechanism working behind the wish to get in.
In this article now I want to outline the story of a *knight* who wanted to get into the castle, and how his activities an hopes have been destroyed by the (social) thorns around the tower. I'll do this in presentation of some biographical work, that's why I firstly want to discuss this approach in the field of empirical research.

There is a still growing interest in using biographical approaches in the field of social and educational research (first for practitioners and now even for researchers). It can be explained by the originality of the social and individual construct *biography*. This construct means two sides of life, emergence, subjectivity and structure, in other words, the object and the subject perspective. The theoretical concepts dealing with biography try to describe and explore life-course in the connection of both of these aspects of human beeings, emergence and structure, the coping strategies of individuals with structures and the opening horizons of redesigning one's own life.
Biographical resources have also been used in various fields of education to develop and analyse the processes of learning. Many different ways and methods have been created and built up a "culture of biography", which asks for the certain circumstances of life-courses.
On the way to clearify the consequences of the work with life-histories, it is important to pronounce the dynamic and dialectic perspectives in the connection of structure and subjectivity. Biography in that sense can be seen as a social institution and as an organizing principal of individual life.
The term biography is used in the field of social sciences not as a trivial sequence of contingent life events, but in essential parts as a given social structure to be actualized by individuals. What makes this approach very exciting are two theoretical assumptions about the key-term *experience*. Experience is always acquired on the basis of available, organized structures of knowledge. It is impossible to talk about "experiences in itself". What we call our own knowledge is always "articulated biographically" (Schütz/Luckmann 1979). This dialectic perspective shows, that life is no harmonious play between emergence and structure. The dimensions of emergence and structure, and the perspectives of person and object do not fit directly. Their relation is one of dialectical tensions, the foundation of any subjectivity. Biographical action is guided by socially pre-given development patterns, needs them and cannot escape their constrains, but is not obsorbed by repetetive action. It does not merely

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reproduce certain social structure conditions but always has the additional character of an open design.
Subjective life-stories obtained by interviews are one way of approaching the complex phenomenons of reality from certain perspectives. In sociology life-stories have been applied in different ways.

Methodological assumptions

A set of assumptions lies behind this approach to interpretative analysis.
The discovery of the structure behind intended action, the analysis of a biographical frameworks needs a complex methodological base. Very different materials (interviews, field observations or other documents, like diaries or letters) provided indipensible data for social research. Social phenomenons are complex phenomenons and the basic question facing us is how to capture this compelexitivity. The main issues for me are:

- The *discovery of grounded theory,* the methods of theoretical samplings by A. Strauss and B. Glaser (see Strauss 1987) and
- The analysis of *Process-Structures of Life-Course* by F. Schütze (see Schütze 1983, 1984, 1987, 1995).

Theoretical sampling means a sampling of incidents, events, activities, populations etc. directed by the envolving theory. It is used to compare between and among those samples of activities, populations or something like that (see Strauss 1987).
F. Schütze has used examples of biographical "trajectories" or "changing processes" to show how structures dominate biographies for long periods. With narrative interviews we can reconstruct individuell actions in the framework of social situations. Stories about ones life are really close to the frames of life-orientation. There are four *cognitive figures* which can be found in a recapitulation of experiences (see Schütze 1984):

- *Biography- and eventholder* (Biographie- und Ereignisträger), which are surrounded by the social connections.
- *The frame of events and experiences* (Ereignis- und Erfahrungsverkettungen)
- *Situations, life milieux and social structures* as the setting of orientation and condition
- *The real shape of life-history* (Grundgestalt der Lebensgeschichte).

These cognitive figures are some kind of a dynamic landscape, in which our narration builds up a story. The basic process-structures of life-courses, which deal with a certain way of pronounciation in the meaning of experiences can be rebuild in four different attitudes:

- *The biographical action scheme* (das biographische Handlungsschema) which shows each single person as a creator of his own biography, all those biographical procedures which are planned by the individual.
- *Institutional patterns for life-course procedure* (institutionelle Ablaufmuster), which means the aspect of integration and institutionalisation of each individuel beeing, are established control patterns at the societal level.
- *Life "trajectories"* (Verlaufskurven), which are largely identical with "processes of suffering"
- *Transformation processes* (Wandlungsprozesse) means all the unexpected reorganization of action-schematic activities, if they become necessary within the "inner world" of the biographical subject.

In this modell we see biographies as sequential orders of pre-given social "patterns", which can be analyzed with narrative methods, especially the narrative interview.
The narrative interview is based on the interviewer dispensing with any attempts to structure the conversation. The stock of experience and orientation of the informant is important.
This interview always starts with a kind of contract in bringing narrations to run:
I want to ask you to tell me your life-story, all the events, which have been important to you. You can use as much time as you need. I don't want to interrupt you, I only will make some notices for some questions afterwards.

This means that the narrator had to organize the dominant lines of narrative for autobiographical recollection, he creates hierarchies and competition. In any case, he falls back on the cognitive figure of the total shape of his life history.
Fritz Schütze's thesis that "*impromptu narratives of a person's own experience cannot be adequately analysed by the social science unless their autobiographical components are systematically taken into account*" (Schütze 1984, p.78) seems self-evident. So we have to discover the "logic" of autobigraphical structuring of experience. This special kind of reality is biographically constructed for the everyday narrator.

On the way to a full business manager. *Mr. A.* - A case-Study

Now I want to focus and to discuss one case of my empirical work dealing with this approach and the connection between subjective and structural conditions and coping strategies in individuals lives.
My last works have dealed with the meaning of creativity processes in institutional school-settings from a constructivistic view and *the meaning of modern educational biographies in the pressure between individual contradictions and social changes.*
I actually analyzed some heuristical typologies of nowadays educational expectations and possible integrations of adult education in one's life. Especially now I want to portrait one life-course of a man to show the role of institutional settings in his biographical career. This example will maybe help to understand, to analyse some interdisciplinary perspectives in dealing with the social sructured conditions of individual suffering.

Mister A. is one of the men of my sample out of 20 (see Egger 1995). I met him in his own small flat, an unpretentious two rooms flat (Ikea design). After explaining the certain way of the narrative interview, he began to talk.
As a short opening I want to give you some information about Mr. A.

- *Born in Vienna (parents emigrated from Prag 1958)*
- *Removal to a small town in Styria at the age of 2 years*
- *Removal to the capital city of Styria at the age of 5 years*
- *Primary school*
- *Gymnasium until the 2nd class*
- *Secondary school until the end (4th class)*
- *Gymnasium, breaking off in the 7th class*
- *Trying to get the maturity at some extern ways with no success*
- *Army*
- *Trying to find a job, no longer stays in one*
- *Completing a merchandising coures on the university for externals*
- *Beginning of the "SBP", a way of going to university without maturity*

At the time of this interview Mr. A. is 33 years old, he's working at a nonprofit organsisation which tries to help refugees. His family is coming from the former CSSR, father and mother had been integrated into the middleclass in Prag. They never felt at home in Austria, even they hadn't enough money to live their usual life. Mr. A. was their one and only child. He begins the interview with the following words:

Well, I grew up in a small town ... in ... there was nothing exciting around us ... I mean the town was wonderfull as a town, but there was no life at all. Even all the people they always tried to hide all their lives from each other, it was only a bad game of beeing a society. I felt that very strong, even in my childhood. Everything was locked, in a certain way of broken lives.

His narration starts with the actualisation of the circumstances of his own childhood in a very emotionally way. The closeness of his first years are told as very strong. On the one hand, there were the parents with their special overprotection, on the other hand the reduced social abilities in a small provincial town. But there was also his mother, she was a springboard into another world.

My parents, they acted in the same strange way as everybody in this town. On sunday, we went to church, but on the other days, I had to stay at home. That's what I hated, even when I was a child. My mother was different to all the other persons. She was well educated, she always wanted to give me support in education, in literature, music. My father was a ingenieer, he was always in job, and when he was at home, everything had to be perfect, no problems, no worries. My mother was absolutely superior to my father, but when he was at home, she subordinated to my father. That's what I never understood. But she always made us as a family.

Staying together is the main topic in the following passages of the interview. An emigration family wants to get familiar with a foreign country. The little town with it's own socio-culturell structures produces a confined milieu which gave Mr A. his very first basic social experiences. His mother has a wide horizon, but she also subordinates to the social structures. His school-career begins with "psychogical problems" in the first year, he can't bring, what his father expects from him. There are a lot of problems with other kids in school. He passes primary scholl, goes to gymnasium, where he can't succeed, changes to secondary school and after that there's another trial to go to the gymnasium. He breaks down again, after two years of fights. But there was also a strong and joyaful movement in these years, when he could write some articles for the school-paper. But teachers disliked his "anarchistic tendencies", so he finshes school after all. Then he tries to make some examinations at schoolexternal institutions, but he had no motivation. At the age of 18 he's joining the army, where he learns "a lot of good things". He learns a lot about first aid, begins to translate Charles Dickens from english to german, to use this useless time. He is not really integrated in the community, but he can make the meaning of nearnees and beeing outside by his own. This institution gives him a certain kind of security, in which his own abilities can grow up. What he needs is a special form of outside compulsives to develop his own inner freedom.

He subordinates himself unter the restrictive commands of the army, but beyond these superficial structures he is "awake" for everything new, for new chances to build up his own creativity. In his narration of this time you can feel joy and hope. As a structural theme there can be recognized a subjective ability of building up zones of freedom in very unflexible circumstances. The totatality of the institution army (you stay the whole week there, even the night), which brings a lot of problems to other people, makes him ready to find a point of security, from where he starts to new horizons. Under the cover of pressure, there is a self-organized way of dealing with stories and work. It`s funny to see, how he handles with this eight month. Nobody is expecting great efforts from him, and in this situation he`s highly motivated to develop himself.
After this passage he stops his narration, he comes into a kind of interpretation of his life. He says, that his way is in maybe "natural", all the escaping-strategies from schools and expected performances are natural in his own biographical action-scheme. Now he`s looking back to his life and he recognizes:

That`s why I am ... maybe ... I`m a funny guy, a little bit confuse and difficult to handle. Nobody can tell me all the bullshit why I have to do all the things all the others are doing, that`s why they hated me, at school. And that`s why I`m too late in my life, because all of my companions at my age have a familiy, and I'm still living allone.

This interpretation leads Mr. A. in a position in which he`s comparing his own situation with others. He never cared much about what other people did, which ways they went, but now he`s contrasting his situation, his deviant life-course, with the "normal side". And he`s too late. The generell view into his life-courses gives him at this time of the narration a feeling of insufficience, a deficit, because he isn`t yet at the place, he wants to be. At this time he breaks with narration, there is critical, a wounded point.

This beginning of the interview can be marked into 5 segments:
1) Rebellion against the social milieu
2) The story of the family

3) Beginning of his school-career and first bad experiences
4) Army, new inner horizons
5) Autobriographical balancing

After a pause he starts again with some chronological details of his story. After the army he tried to find a job, he worked in many different professions, but never longer than one year. The same chronology of desasters. But after six or seven years living in that kind of trajectories he recognized a different mood in his way of seeing his own life.

Well, I was 26, 27 and without any success, and I was an outsider, really, I always wanted to learn something, earn some money in the night, but if there was a better job, I had no chance without the right papers. But I recognized, that I was better in some things, organizing and managing than the well educated people. I had a chief who told me, that I'm better than the others, and he would give me a better job. But it didn`t work for a long time, because of the colleagues, they didn`t want me. So I knew, I had a lot of competences and speciall skills, but no paper. ... So I had to decide, should I go my own way any longer, working until it was exciting and then go away, or should I try to get some institutional degrees. But from where could I get these?

He started a merchandising course for external people at university, and after one year he got a degree, which was nearly worthless for the market. But he saw, that he could learn like other people. It was a surprise after all theses disappointments. And he got something else:

There was a term in this course which fascinated me absolutely: "With the carefullness of a full business-manager". I understood at once, what this ment, what this means for my life. If I`m a business manager I`m responsible for everything in my store, in my business. Nobody will or can help me. I'm the only one who`s responsible! I understood at once, that this is also the great task for my own life, what I ever wanted to do. I`m responsible for everything. I know, what`s important in life, that`s what other people don`t know. I only miss the degrees. So I decided to hurry up, because I hope, I've enough time, to reach my goals.

What he described in theses sequences is the contradiction between subjective experience and social compulsion. On the one hand Mr. A. is trying to deal with his own experiences, to build up his own goals, own ways, on the other he`s willing to come into institutional settings, to work with his kind of experience. But the labour market and the educational settings are not prepared to this kind of qualification. If somebody has left the certain way of education, it`s very hard to get in touch with good opportunities. Mr. A.`s reactions to these circumstances are focused in a fragmentation of his personal horizons. He knows, that he has to be fixed into institutionall scores, but he isn't ready to finish his own projects. But he felt, that there is a contradiction in his story, between the normative system of orientation (familiy, school, labour) and the subjective structures of his own experiences (to be a pioneer, to be active all allone). He knows, that he`s yet the *full business manager* which can make clear decisions, but he has no chance, no financial and social capital to be sucessfull. That`s why he needs institutionalized knowledge. This kind of knowledge is hard to get for a man, who wants to go his own way. But he`s willing to get it now, to synchronise his individuell power to the social structures.

I think there can be seen *three contexts of life as structures* in biographical educational processes:

- Rebellion and destroying of the imposed biographical scheme, refusual of the normal biographical action scheme
- Building up an experiental basis in between fragmentations, individual competences and qualifications
- Trying to synchronize these different bases of knowledge and experiences under institutionalized contexts.

The *changing of these contexts* was attended from generally breaks in his life-course. In the retrospective he can see two streams of development: First a frictioned one, that was

dominated by breaks and crises, second a structure of continuity (he has to go this way, to come to this important, certain attitude in which he´s looking to his career now).
He finishes his narration with a view into future. He`s now involved in an educational setting to get maturity and than he wants to study economics at the distance university in Hagen. He`s absolutely confident to make this way.

Learning processes between subject and structure - Transitorical educational processes

Which consequences for adult education can be shown out of this reconstruction of this biography? At least I want to make a link to a concept which is very clear and complex in dealing with such stories. It`s developed by *P. Alheit* and is called *biographicity*, that means the *ability to attach modern stocks of knowledge to biographical resources of meaning* and, with this knowledge, to associate oneself afresh.
This scetch of this self-made man (except the confident basic mood at the end) can be seen as a classical trajectory. The whole life of Mr. A. is a fight against organized educational settings, which are contradictional to his own meaning of learning. His individualistic movement to get in touch with the backdoor of education doesn`t fit into the context of the traditionell kind of qualification (and allocation). He has to go back to the start, on that ceratin place in our educational system, which evidently differs into well- and bad educated people, the maturity, the final school examination. He`s ready now to make all these steps systematically, with a clear time-perspective and a functional goal. His strategy of synchronization tries to make a linkage between everydays experience and vocational strategies. Behind this case we can see a transitoric learning-process. Mr. A.`s career describes a phemomenon which in sociology is called "Akteursgenese" *actors genesis*. Men decide themselves for different routes to run their lives, they want to build up their own "course of life". Even theses processes are often very painful, after a period of time their competences, which had a nearly unworthy meaning in the past (the view for the small parts, the focus of non-formalized educational movements etc.) could be intergated into the concious, available behaviour- and action-schemes (inside an institutional frame). The building of biographical knowledge is changing in transformation processes, in which an unexpected reorganization of the "inner world" took place. The former unlived and maybe punished resources of life are getting new relevance, they become the center of new orientations, what P. Alheit describes with *transitorical learning*. He says, that educational settings should focus their work in *coaching processes*, because the accumulation of knowledge is no longer a guarantee for success. *"'Coaching' in this context involves the joint discovery by teacher and learner of biographical opportunties for shaping social, occupational and political existence more autonomously"* (Alheit 1995, p. 68).

That means for me, that all the processes of biographical communication are necessary for the working in educational settings. This little paper should outline my way of looking at educational settings, in which the sensibility for the social and the indivdual reality is important to get in touch with the stories behind the faces. Otherwise the term *key-qualification* will be only a tool for economic interests, for the builder of the castles and the evil godmothers - but that's another story.

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